



ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF

P.D.A.

MR. BRIAN Ó MAOILCHIARÁIN

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2014

Strand Hotel Limerick

AREA 7

(Kerry / Limerick)

Fáiltiú

A chairde, mar uachtarán PDA is mór an chúis áthais agus go deimhin bróid dom é fíor-chaoin fháilte a chur romhaibh go léir chuig comhdháil bhliantúil PDA anseo i gcathair Luimní. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh tairbhe as an gclár atá leagtha amach agus taitneamh as comhlúadar a chéile le linn na comhdhála.

As PDA President it's my pleasant duty, yet again, to bid you all a genial welcome to our 45th Annual Conference. Personally, on my own behalf and on behalf of PDA national executive I thank you, I am very well aware of the extremely busy, hectic schedules you all have and sincerely appreciate your efforts to come here today. Go raibh maith agaibh.

The conference theme 'Embracing Educational Opportunities' is, I believe, very fitting as our nation exits the economic crisis during which so much was sacrificed in terms of student supports while simultaneously many new initiatives were introduced.

It's a rather uncanny thing but each time I hear the word 'opportunity' in a context such as this, the words of Brutus as he spoke to Cassius come to

mind, an indelible imprint from those school days where we learned extracts off-by-heart,

'There is a tide in the affairs of men.

Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;'

Omitted, all the voyage of their life

Is bound in shallows and in miseries'.

Our recent voyage during the last 5 years of unprecedented economic hardship has been in the shallows and the truth be told it brought with it many 'miseries' in the individual and collective lives of the communities whom we serve. In more recent times however, as we appear to be exiting the fiscal crisis, which saw us lose our sovereignty, there is a sense of hope and opportunity in our nation's narrative – we have gone from being a basket case economy to the most buoyant economy in the European Union!

You Colleagues, under trying conditions, have managed your schools through five years of austerity and relentless change in work conditions. Firstly, Croke Park 1, followed by Croke Park 2 which was rejected to be later accepted as Haddington Road, and then the already draconian cuts were compounded and deepened by the FEMPI act.

Secondly, the upward revision of the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) and the removal of the ex-quota guidance allocation was a direct hit on subject provision in your schools and colleges. Lastly, repeated early retirement packages lead to the premature departure of many of our more experienced colleagues - an arguably needless loss of intellectual capital.

Notwithstanding all that and more, we have navigated to the present, we have, on shoestring budgets and despite dismantled middle-management structures, stayed the course so to speak. Indeed, since we last met many of our schools and centres have experienced some reliefs under the Haddington Road agreement and the consequent filling of well overdue posts of responsibilities.

Meetings with TUI and ETBI

PDA continues to represent your views and concerns at regular meetings with TUI and ETBI- included among the topics discussed during the past year were:- Staff allocations, School non-pay Budgets, Middle Management structures, Increasing Work load, Representation for Principals and Deputies (Grievance Procedures and Bullying procedures), Posts of Responsibilities Directive, Circular 43/14 - Revised arrangements for SnS, Revised arrangements for 33 hours, SNA's duties,

SOLAS – Strategy for FE (the lack of capital funding for the sector is most worrying) Travel claims by teachers commuting between Centres, Whole School Inspections, the casualisation of the profession and School Self Evaluation.

Time does not allow commentary on all matters concerning us currently. Therefore, I will focus today on 3 areas of significant concern - the proposed reforms at Junior cycle, middle management, and guidance counselling provision.

However, before that it would be remiss of me not to welcome recent developments which will help address the scourge of casualisation in the teaching profession.

Casualisation

Undoubtedly, what has become known as the casualisation of the profession has in recent years been most unsettling and needed resolving. When one considers that nearly a half of second level teachers less than 35 years of age – and a third of all teachers – are currently in part-time employment, applying for fragments of jobs with little or no guarantee of being retained from year to year, evidently, such a position is unsustainable.

Although some further discussions need to take place, PDA welcomes the new arrangements recommended by Peter Ward, Senior Counsel. The recommendations are widely viewed as a major breakthrough, secured by second level unions TUI and ASTI which will provide job security to temporary/ part-time teachers after just two years.

The qualification period for offer of a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) was reduced from 4 years to 3 years in the case of teachers and lecturers with effect from 1st July 2013. The expert group on casualisation which was also provided for under the terms of the Haddington Road Agreement and its recommendations further reduce the qualification period of a CID to just, and I quote 'a period of continuous employment in excess of two years', subject to criteria.

Additionally, re-advertising a position after year 1 if the hours are available is recommended and also 'the exclusion that currently applies to a teacher covering for another teacher on career break or secondment should be abolished and that the teacher who provided the cover and qualified for a CID be placed on the Redeployment Panel'.

It is further recommend that the voluntary redeployment scheme which was initiated on a pilot basis in Connaught be extended.

These recommendations and others, of the expert group will go a long way in dealing with the problem of casualisation and will provide teachers with viable career paths. This is a significant step in the right direction insofar as the new system will afford teachers job security. It will also ensure that the profession remains attractive to graduates of a very high calibre.

Budget

This year's budget, for the second consecutive year was neutral. Last year I called on principals from every sector to be of one voice in our collective efforts to reclaim the vital supports and resources taken from our schools and colleges – I reiterate that call now!

This year's budget headline grabbers included:- an extra 470 teachers (300 due to demographics and 170 Resource Teachers) 95 more SNA's (mainly due to demographics); €6m extra for Literacy & Numeracy strategy; €5m extra for Junior Cycle Reform; €1m for Music Generation; €3m for high speed Broadband; A reduction of 1% in Capitation Grant to €296 (€301 in 2014);

Approx 270,000 Further Education and Training places to be maintained;
Almost €36 million is being provided under the first round of funding for
the Summer Works Scheme.

I welcome the fact that very few cuts were made but we must be clear –
most of the increases are due to upward demographic pressures! And
nothing lost to the austerity agenda has been replaced!

Over the next three years, 40,000 additional students will enrol in our
schools – over 13,000 of them next September alone, it is unsurprising
that a €60 million increase in the education budget was recently
announced.

Likewise the €7 million being allocated to secure the future of Design and
Communication Graphics (DCG) in our schools is urgently needed to
replace both the software contract and the computers themselves which
were initially supplied in 2007.

The technological landscape is constantly and continually changing and
our education system needs high levels of ICT investment to adapt to this
new environment. PDA welcomes the Digital Strategy for Schools but we
stress that it must be properly resourced.

The proposals for Junior Cycle reform involve a new approach to teaching and learning with greater use of technology, both in the classroom and in assessment, which is aimed at encouraging more independent thinking among students. In many respects these are overdue and necessary. Nonetheless, if one considers that €7m is required to support 11,000 pupils in DCG, one of the main subjects where IT is central to assessment it will take some 'real investment' to support @175,000 pupils and their schools if we are serious about digital technology engagement in a reformed Junior Cycle!

Regrettably, the budget did address the 2009 worsening of the general PTR from 18:1 to 19:1; the attack in subsequent years on the ratios at Leaving Certificate Vocational and Post Leaving Certificate levels or the 2012 insidious cut in ex-quota guidance counselling provision.

These cuts took the real resource, the most influential, the most valuable resource out of education – the teacher!

In the early years of the recession it was referred to as ‘harvesting in excess of 1,100 teachers’ or more. At that time PDA submitted a paper to DES illustrating that net cost to the State of keeping teachers in the classroom as opposed to confining them to the dole queue was as little as €14 per day – colleagues they have not been replaced and our education system is the poorer for it!

Commenting on this year’s budget, Minister O’Sullivan said,

“.... it is my intention that the improving economic situation will pay a very real dividend to education, an investment that has enormous economic and social benefits.’

I say to you delegates that if any *real* dividend is to be seen it must come in the form of additional resourcing. She also stated that she believes:-

‘.....now is the time to figure out what our collective priorities for investment in future years should be’

I welcome and I believe her commitment to engage with the education partners in determining our priorities. This, delegates, presents as an opportunity and we can set the scene by saying that

quality education cannot be provided for on the 'cheap' - one can spin it any which way, but ultimately,

- until the cuts in PTR are reversed (especially and urgently the ex-quota guidance provision),
- until middle management systems meet the needs of our students and schools,
- until new programmes are adequately resourced both in time and money –

Until then and only then can it be said that real investment is truly being made!!

JUNIOR CYCLE REFORM

Delegates as you know, following a presentation by Dr. Anne Looney, NCCA, to the PDA Annual Conference in November 2012 on the proposed new Junior Cycle Framework, many concerns were expressed by the Principals and Deputy Principals attending the conference. The PDA suggested the establishment of a network of small vocational

schools to consider the unique challenges that such schools envisaged in the implementation of the framework.

In light of the TUI/ASTI directive on industrial action, meetings and seminars related to the PDA / NCCA network activity have ceased for the time being. Given the positive responses received thus far from the network, it is hoped the current difficulties can be satisfactorily resolved allowing the full activity of the network to resume.

The proposed Junior Certificate reforms have been rejected by the teaching profession as demonstrated by a resounding mandate for industrial action up to, and including strike action. Indeed the overwhelming majority of the public, in a poll taken last May, also expressed strong dissatisfaction with the new proposals.

However, we should not be overly surprised by this reaction. Indeed, I think that such robust, frank exchanges of views are a healthy thing because implementing real curriculum change, involving

changes in content -what we teach,

in methodology - how we teach,

and finally in outcomes – how we assess or test is indeed challenging, very challenging as it signals a deviation from the accepted norm.

Therefore, one should reasonably expect claims and counter claims in the forging of a radically new system.

It is **true** to say that there is a strong, embedded, cultural norm of ‘written tests’ in Ireland, hence expectedly, the majority of teachers, students and parents associate assessment with a written test of one kind or another. Reforming a publically ‘trusted, tried and tested’ model brings with it an inevitable resistance.

On the other hand, it is also true to say that much of the criticism levelled against the current educational experience at junior cycle focuses on an outdated emphasis on rote learning, on a teaching-to-the-test approach, and the consequent narrowing of the educational experience for young people especially at lower secondary level.

Yet, despite the controversies, there is common consensus around the objectives of Junior Cycle reform and the need to effect change.

At this juncture I would like to thank Mick Daly for his efforts in facilitating the PDA / NCCA network and for his comprehensive report on the progress to date. It was envisaged that the network would help to inform the NCCA, other PDA/TUI members as to the implications for small vocational schools emanating from the proposed Junior Cycle Framework.

The following are some of the concerns raised in terms of the implementation of the framework and have fed into TUI submissions to the DES:-

- The **time tabling** of the programme in the schools especially when the TYP, LCVP, LC and PLC programmes are also to be considered. Some schools also have autism units on the campus.
- **Subject options** and the anticipated competition for subjects versus short course allocated time on the school timetable for subjects. Fear for the loss of subject options and courses in small schools.

- The needs of the assessment regime as described - internal and external moderation proposals. It was observed that **‘Quality Assurance’** in terms of the assessment of the Junior Certificate can be relied upon at present through the work of the SEC. The exact application of the internal and external moderation in schools and between schools was a serious concern.
- The local school certification of students. **National Certification** of some type was the preferred option.
- The position of students with **special educational needs** in the programme and the addressing of their needs.
- The **resources** to support the implementation and school facilities eg. ICT, storage, expertise, to enable the programme to be implemented.
- The **time** needed for implementation from Principals/Deputy Principals and Teachers. Where in the school year would this time be found in an already busy school calendars.
- The **parents’ perception** would be pivotal to the programme’s success. Schools would examine the relationship and communications with parents. What is to be communicated to

parents and in particular prospective parents enrolling their children in the individual schools? The construction of a possible/draft communications documents for parents on the JC programme.

- The future role of the **ETBs**, their possible collaboration across schools and their role in the support of schools in the implementation of the programme eg. School co-operation and resources etc.
- Features of Quality in the **moderation process** were seen as pivotal in that it was felt that assessment was about the work produced by the students. The moderation process was viewed as critical.

These concerns indicate some of the challenges facing our schools in implementing the proposals as set out in the framework. Indeed, there is a genuine concern that standards could be affected.

Teachers support many elements of the proposals but are opposed to the replacement of the traditional Junior Certificate exams with teachers assessing their own students for a school-based Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA).

Unless adequate resourcing and supports are put in place it is feared that such a change will undermine education standards.

Schools are also justifiably concerned about their capacity to embrace the radical changes involved. After years of education cutbacks coupled with the dismantling of middle management structures schools warn of the potential for the proposals to exacerbate inequality between schools and students.

Education Minister Jan O'Sullivan, who will address you later this afternoon, and the second-level teacher unions have been involved in a talks process, under independent chairperson, Dr. Pauric Travers, former President of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, aimed at finding a resolution.

To date, three meetings have taken place, one in September, and another a fortnight ago and as you know the meetings held this week have proven difficult but I expect the parties to re-engage in the not too distant future.

As I mentioned earlier, Irish people have a huge degree of trust in the current school system and its teachers; so, too, have employers and businesses.

When asked at last week's **Web Summit** why Ireland is such an attractive destination for multi-national businesses, CEOs of global organisation repeatedly referred to the talent pool in Ireland, and the depth of it, as the most significant determining factor in their decision to locate in Ireland. We must not forget that the talent referred to is the product of our current education system. Therefore, the real engagement of the minister with our teacher unions is encouraging and offers a reassurance that the baby won't be thrown out with the bath water!

Middle Management

*A half of all respondents claimed that while the work of a principal / deputy principal is rewarding and important, the workload is so excessive that it impacts **negatively** on my work-life balance
(ETBI Survey)*

*1 in 5 agreed with the statement that the workload and responsibilities are so onerous that I feel **constantly** stressed (ETBI Survey)*

In the Chief Inspector's report 2010-2012 it was acknowledged that the negative effect of the loss of middle management posts was evident. During that time, you will well remember there was a hiatus, of sorts, during which no meaningful discussions about improving 'middle management structures' and the continuing plight of Principals and Deputies Principals could be facilitated. Thankfully discussions are currently underway.

As late as 6th September this year it was reported in the media that DES officials had briefed the then newly appointed Minister Jan O'Sullivan that *'some education cuts have pushed the system to the brink'* and that the *"degree of loss of the posts in many second-level schools has had a significant impact on the leadership of those schools"* rendering the current position as "unsustainable".

*“Rarely avail of midterm breaks, etc. ...no way I can sustain my current commitment to this job. This is **sad** as I love what I do”*
(ETBI Survey)

*“I can't see myself in the job in 3 years and I am only 54 as I just **can't** cope and feel overwhelmed with the work”* (ETBI Survey)

In recent weeks the DES has committed to engaging with the education partners on the matter. A revision of middle management structures is imminent – the various managerial bodies have published papers and made their respective submissions to the DES in this regard.

The adoption of the Haddington Road agreement has led to the restoration of the limited alleviation for assistant principal posts in our schools. Albeit small, I believe this to be a first step and I see an opportunity presenting, an opportunity we must grasp with both hands so as to ensure that re-designed, re-established and renewed middle management structures are sufficiently resourced to facilitate teaching, learning and student supports in our schools and centres.

No longer should it be tolerated, as evidenced in ETBI's recent survey that more than 6 in 10 of us believe that:-

*'my work is both important and rewarding; however, the inadequacy of the in-school-management system results in constant **distraction** from my core functions'. (ETBI Survey)*

GUIDANCE

It is undeniable that principals and deputies are overburdened and under-supported. It is equally true that student support services have been undermined. It is of urgent and immediate importance that the ex-quota guidance counselling provision be re-instated!

Shane Martin, one of our keynote speakers at last year's conference, spoke of building resilience in our school communities. He cited Rutter, saying that schools which provide support and resources to facilitate students reach their potential, have incredibly high rates of academic success. We do not need convincing on this point but schools do need adequate resourcing in both time and money to provide student supports.

Another salient, unforgettable point made by Shane was, that when he commenced his training in psychology in the early nineties the rule of thumb, from the World Health Organisation was that 1 in 8 people experienced mental health issues at some stage in their lives and, that the average initial age of sufferers was 27 years. Now, in the second decade of this century the rate has doubled to 1 in 4 and the average age has halved to 14 years!

Where are these 14 year old Irish adolescents? Yes, colleagues, they are in our schools. Never before has there been such a grave need for guidance counselling in our schools, never before have so many of our young adolescents struggled, never before had students to cope with the ills of social media and yet, a cut in guidance provision was imposed – it beggars belief!

School principals and deputies are only too well aware of the challenges facing our youth, as we heard earlier - 80% of respondents, when asked to what extent the removal of the ex-quota guidance provision had

increased their workload – 4 in every 5 of us, or 80%, experienced a significant or very significant increase.

Furthermore, **90%** were strongly of the view that their schools did not have an adequate guidance and counselling service for their students.

The minister has said and I quote:-

“In recent weeks I have had a positive engagement with all the partners in education.... setting out..... priorities for future investment. I plan to continue this dialogue with partners to assist me in establishing a framework of priorities in the sector”

I ask the minister and her Department to pay particular heed to these responses; to pay heed to the findings of the recently published ESRI Paper – *“Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study of Post-School Transitions”* which highlights the importance of a whole-school approach to guidance.....with author Selina McCoy stating the – “importance of

providing a supportive school climate which encourages high aspirations among all students”.

In February the DES published a guide to developing

‘Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools’ this booklet follows two previous related documents –

‘Well Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention’, (DES, 2013) and

‘A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools’, (DES, 2010).

The authors must be complimented. These publications are important resources for schools in promoting and protecting students’ well-being, they provide comprehensive frameworks to support students with social, emotional and academic needs. What they do not provide is the time, the expertise and the teacher allocation for successful implementation!

Not unrelated to counselling is the scourge of bullying. Minister O’Sullivan announced lately that additional funding of €55,000 is being provided to support the delivery of anti-bullying training sessions for parents in

2014. This is on top of the €60,000 announced earlier this year bringing the 2014 allocation to a total of €115,000.

The National Parents Council Post Primary and Primary jointly called for training and resources for parents and boards of management to support the implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying. The minister listened to the call and showed her commitment by providing the extra funding. We ask that the calls from schools be heeded also!

We all want what is best for our students but we urgently need resources to ensure quality provision! Such is the gravity of this matter that I strongly repeat the ex-quota guidance counselling provision be reinstated without unnecessary delay, and that this could be done independently of the broader middle management issue!

PDA Restructuring

PDA Executive motion proposing to reorganise PDA areas to reflect the sixteen ETB areas was unanimously accepted earlier today.

The benefits of networking are well documented and it is advantageous to us all, ETB principals and deputies, to develop and strengthen our PDA local networks. Principals' calendars are very busy; I suggest PDA members arrange area meetings to coincide with ETB school meetings with Chief Executives.

I further believe it to be crucially important, especially so at the dawning of the ETB era, that principals and deputies seize this opportunity to reorganise themselves thus ensuring their voice is heard in this new education landscape. Ní neart go cur le chéile!

CONCLUSION

I hope that you have enjoyed conference thus far – Pat O' Mahony's insightful presentation earlier today was very thought provoking. I look forward to hearing both David Ruddy and Dr. Pdraig Kirk tomorrow. I

also remind you that there will be two sessions of this afternoon's workshops giving you an opportunity to pick any two of the presentations.

Before I finish there are some people I wish to thank. Firstly, Area 7 conference organising committee which has been meticulous in its preparations, especially so, Stephen Goulding. I must also draw your attention to the conference booklet – an excellent publication containing so much current and historical information – a benchmark publication!

Secondly, to all our TUI colleagues – President Gerry Quinn, General Secretary John Mac Gabhann, and all at TUI head office – for their continued support, advice and assistance to PDA, I thank you. Sincere thanks also to Michael Moriarty and his staff in the ETBI.

Finally, to PDA National Executive, and its officers Gerry, Stephen, Kevin and Brian – for your encouragement and support I am very grateful, it is indeed a privilege to work with you and with such a diligent, committed executive.

Recently retired PDA Vice President, Mary Friel, deserves special mention for her tremendous contribution to the association as do the co-opted advisors, all former Presidents of the association, Mattie Kilroy, Tom Hughes and Mick Daly.

Mar fhocal scoirr, in my concluding remarks last year I expressed a hope, that on meeting each other again we would be in a better place. I believe we are, and I further believe it will be better again when we next meet in Galway on November 11th, 12th and 13th, 2015.

By then, along with other advances, I expect certainty on the Junior Cycle, I am convinced that by then schools will enjoy enhanced, hopefully fit-for-purpose middle management structures.

I believe the tide has turned and that new structures and revised programmes will be forged in the coming months. I urge you to be involved, engage with your local PDA network, ensure your voice is heard and embrace the opportunity.

I will conclude as I began with the rest of Brutus' counsel when he spoke of the *'tide in the affairs of men'* – he also cautioned, that waiting around only allows your power to pass its crest and begin to ebb - if the opportunity is "omitted", one will find oneself stranded in miserable shallows -

***'On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures'.***

Go raibh maith agaibh.